

Free To Grow

How many preachers are with us this morning? I'm looking out and trying to count... wow, there are so many here today! ... The truth is every one of us who lives in Christ preaches Him every day. **We all preach by what we say and by how we live.** It all begins with what we say to ourselves.

Preaching To Yourself

The Good News we have in Jesus Christ may be easy to believe but it is not always easy to live. We just believe the gospel in order to be saved – right? We hear it, we believe it, and hopefully have a transforming experience that confirms the gospel truth ... “born again” if you will. But what then? Do we live as though the gospel has no further relevance? It gets us “in the door,” so to speak, but it’s not part of our daily life. Maybe we treat the gospel like we treat our church membership: I’m in now so that’s done, now I can just do the “church thing” once in a while and I’m good. But the gospel isn’t like that. It’s salvation and calling: God’s gift of salvation from sin (and all its consequences) and a call to live in Christ. It’s a matter of faith in Christ, which will fade and die if we do not refresh it daily.

We need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day because we forget it every day. It’s a matter of life and death. **...Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life...**
John 5:24.

Here’s a sermon from our Scripture reading that we need to preach to ourselves regularly: **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1.** Notice the word NOW. For those who are in Christ Jesus, now, today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, not after you’ve done more good deeds, but NOW, there is no condemnation. We’re freed from the weight of sin – free to grow as God intends.

This truth is the cornerstone in the foundation of all spiritual growth; and we need the constant reminder that **in Christ we are eternally and always “not condemned” by God.** So, let’s take a closer look at Romans 8:1.

Christian Life As Struggle

We determine to do a number of things that we know will make us better Christians and better people. Maybe it’s read the Bible everyday... maybe it’s attend church more often... maybe it’s smile more, or look for ways to be kind to others. Then as we go through the week, we don’t do number one, we do number two halfway, we skip number three, we get most of number four, and we don’t do number five at all. And maybe we forget to pray as we go along.

Or we get up in the morning and pray, “Lord, with your help, I’m not going to lose my temper today.” We lose it by 9:00 A.M. We pray, “Lord, help me with my critical spirit.” At 10:30 A.M. we’re slicing and dicing. We pray again, “Lord, help me not to gossip.” By the time we get to 1:30 P.M. we’re pouring it out to anyone we can find. The very thing

we said we were going to do, we don't do. And the thing we said we'd never do, we do. Some of us have lived that experience this week. What a struggle it is to live in Christ!

Earlier in his letter to the Christians at Rome Paul had said, *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out...* Romans 7:15, 18b. Hey, isn't he saying the very thing that goes on in us? This is Paul's autobiography. It's his experience as a Christian believer. Isn't it yours and mine as well? Let's be honest. **You can be a very great Christian** as the Apostle Paul was, **and still struggle a great deal in your walk with God.** This is simply part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

We struggle between what we know and what we actually do. We struggle between our better desires and our lesser desires. We struggle between what we know God wants us to do and what we would rather do if God would just leave us alone. We struggle all the time, torn this way and that way. That's part of what it means to live in this sin-cursed world. Anyone who tells you that struggle does not belong in the Christian life actually has a non-Biblical view of what it means to be Jesus' disciple. If Paul struggled, we will struggle too.

Sometimes people come to Christ and then get upset because things don't go well for them. They get upset because they have relationship difficulties, financial difficulties, personal difficulties, emotional difficulties, marital difficulties, or problems in different areas in life. They get discouraged, they get disillusioned, they get angry with God and wonder what's wrong with them. If things don't go the way they want, some people blame God, and turn their back on the Christian life altogether.

In reality there's nothing wrong with you or with God if you're going through a period of struggle. It's just part of what it means to live on this earth. Life is always a mixture of success and failure, ups and downs. **A little success gives us a sense of hope** and **a little failure** (sometimes a lot!) **teaches us humility** and to develop our **trust in God.**

St. Paul finally says this about his struggle and failure to do good, *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* Romans 8:24. He's not just talking about himself. He's talking about me and I suspect he's talking about you. But thank God there's more to the story.

Struggle Without Condemnation

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In the original language of the New Testament the first word in that sentence is: NO. [Greek: Ουδεν]. That's the Greek way of emphasizing a point. Said like Yoda in "Star Wars"- **No condemnation there is.** You might also translate it this way: "There is no condemnation—none whatsoever, absolutely none—for the believer in Christ Jesus."

Let's be clear: he is not saying there is no *cause* for condemnation. That wouldn't be true. You mess up and I mess up. You stray from God and so do I. Sometimes we're just barely making it. **If God judged us moment by moment, there'd be plenty of cause for condemnation.** So that's not what Paul's saying.

Is Paul saying, "There is no failure for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No.

Is he saying, "There is no struggle for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No.

Is he saying, "There is no stumbling for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No.

Here's what **he is saying: there is, therefore now, no punishment,** no coming into judgment, no penal servitude, for the disciple of Jesus Christ. What this means is that we may stumble, we may fall, we may sin and we do, we may get off God's path, we may go astray, we may have a thousand problems, but for the believer in Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation because God has said so.

When Jesus saved you, He didn't say He would take away all your problems or mistakes. He took away your sin. You can struggle, you can fall, you can stray off the path, but you are not condemned because God has said He will not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus.

Good News For Strugglers

In the Gospel of Luke (15:11-32) Jesus tells the story of the Prodigal Son. Maybe you remember how the son demanded an early payout of his inheritance and went off to a far country. There he gave himself to riotous living, spent all his inheritance, and ended up literally living in a pigpen. He hit bottom. What's the difference between a pig and a man in a pigpen? The pig just keeps on eating the slop. After a while, the man says, "I will arise and go to my father." We know how the story ends: the Prodigal Son returns to his father and his father welcomes him home with open arms.

This is a picture of our experience as believers. **Our sin separates us from a close walk with God, but it cannot reverse the divine proclamation of "No condemnation."** Even for those who stray, even for those who have been living for a long time in a place far from God and are embarrassed because they have squandered the spiritual inheritance of God's kingdom ... even for them there is no rejection. If you are scared to death to turn back because you think God's going to condemn you, remember that **God already knows everything you've done and everything you've dreamed of doing. He loves you anyway.** You're still in his family. The moment you say, "I will arise and go to my father," in that very moment He will say, "Let's celebrate. My son/daughter who was lost has come home!"

So, what do we do when we fail? **We repent and pray to God for strength not to do that again.** But what if we make the same mistakes over and over again? We ask God to open our eyes to see that we have a problem, we confess to God and to others, we stop making excuses, we ask others to help us, and we ask God to help us as we move forward.

Jesus already paid the price for our sin and failure to live up to God's standard. Are we willing to believe what God has said? If our debt was paid, it was paid, and that's the end of it; a second payment cannot be demanded. Is Jesus enough for you?

For those who know Jesus Christ there is no condemnation. This truth is foundational to all our spiritual growth and we need to preach it to ourselves daily. Why? because Jesus paid it all. Why? because Jesus condemned sin by His death on the cross. If He condemned sin by His death on the cross, God will never condemn you. Oh yeah, the devil will keep whispering in your ear, "You're no good. You failed. You failed God. You're a loser." Who are you going to believe: the devil or God? Jesus told us, ***I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned...*** John 5:24.

Remember, **we're on the winning team because Christ has already won the victory**

over the devil and death. We're not losers. We get back up when we fall. We repent and start on the path of righteousness again. Because of Christ, we are those who overcome.

Worth Celebrating

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son, John 3:18. If you are outside of Christ, judgment is still in front of you. But if you are in Christ, your judgment is behind you, in the past. You've already been judged, found guilty, but you trusted Christ, and by His death on the cross He took the judgment meant for you.

Where are you right now? Are you outside of Christ with judgment looming ahead, or are you in Christ with judgment behind you? With all of my heart, with every fiber of my being, I urge you, if you are not sure, if you do not know where you stand, to turn to Jesus Christ and embrace the cross. When you come, you will discover the most liberating truth in the world: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If the members of the human race are permitted to yell because their team won a football game, or their candidate won an election, or because their drilling has produced a gusher, there is no reason we cannot shout for joy because we are in Christ Jesus, and there is, therefore, no condemnation for us now! This is the most encouraging spiritual truth that I could share with you. Today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, but NOW, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Let's repeat these words together:

There is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1.